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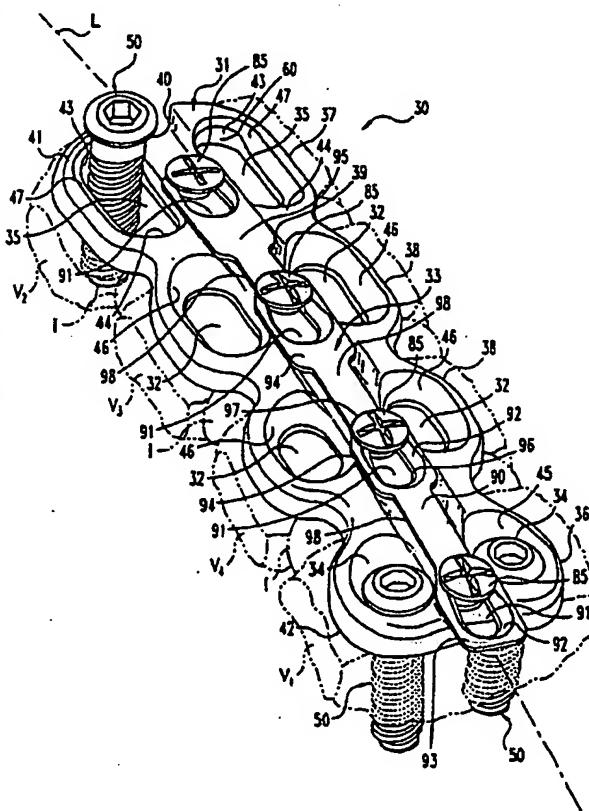
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(54) Title: ANTERIOR CERVICAL PLATING SYSTEM AND METHOD



**(57) Abstract:** The present invention is directed to a system (30) for anterior fixation of the spine that utilizes an elongated fixation plate (31). The plating system (30) stabilizes the spine and promotes fusion and incorporation of a graft or implant in a portion of the spinal column. In one aspect of the invention, the fixation plate (31) has a first end with a pair of holes (34). Bone screws (50) extend through the holes (34) to rigidly secure the plate (31) to a first vertebra. The second end of the plate (31) is provided with a pair of slots (35) through which bone screws (50) extend for engagement with a second vertebra. The screws (50) extending through the slots (35) are translatable in the slot (35) to maintain compression of the spinal column portion. The plating system (30) includes a retainer assembly (33) that prevents screw back out. Methods and instruments relating to the plating system (30) are also described.